

Integrating Web-based Tests in the Classroom

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Introduction

Anyone who has marked a large stack of exams understands how tedious and tiring the process can be. As a result, grading each test with a high-level of accuracy and consistency can become difficult, particularly after a long day of teaching multiple classes, checking students' homework, and attending meetings. Despite a teacher's best efforts, these difficulties may lead to errors when scoring many exams. However, teachers do have an option that alleviates some of the issues that arise once it comes time to assess students' performance – web-based tests (WBT).

What?

As the name implies, WBT are assessments which are delivered via the Internet. Although there are many commercial options available, there are also sites such as *onlinequizcreator.com* and *classmarker.com* (Figure 1) that allow teachers to administer WBT for free. However, some restrictions may apply to these types of accounts. For instance, *onlinequizcreator.com* limits each assessment to fifteen items while *classmarker.com* allows a maximum of 100 tests to be administered per month with a free account. Nevertheless, paid accounts are reasonably priced and allow for some flexibility, often allowing teachers to choose from monthly, annual, or credit-based plans.

Figure 1 *Classmarker.com Website*



Why?

As Brown (1997) states, computers provide a higher-level of accuracy and reliability when compared to paper-based tests (PBT) which are scored by teachers. This advantage in regards to accuracy is also perceived by students, as found in

Nobandegani's (2012) study of the computerized TOEFL exam. In addition, computer-based tests (CBT) as well as WBT can give immediate feedback to students regarding their performance. This eliminates the inevitable delay between the time they finish exams and the moment they receive their test scores and feedback. Moreover, with the exception of essay questions, students' answers are automatically graded, thus saving instructors valuable time.

Another advantage that WBT have which also sets them apart from CBT is that they can be offered anytime and anywhere. Therefore, students are able to take tests from the comfort of their own homes, provided they have Internet access. While this may not be suitable for assessments with medium- to high-stakes such as midterm and final exams or language placement tests, they are appropriate for formative assessments which provide students ongoing feedback to help them improve their performance in class.

While they do offer specific advantages, WBT are "not automatically more suited for the testing of general second language competence or subject-specific second language performance than are other testing mediums" (Roever, 2001, p. 86). As Roever (2001) notes, it may be difficult to assess spoken language due to the high-risk of error when recording test-taker speech. In addition, it has been shown that computer familiarity can affect students' performance on tests. Kirsch, Jamieson, Taylor, and Eignor (1998) surveyed nearly 90,000 test-takers of the computerized TOEFL exam in order to investigate the effects of computer familiarity on test scores and found it had small but significant effect on test performance. Computer anxiety is another variable that may influence students' performance (Brown 1997). Therefore, students' must be given sufficient learner training as well as opportunities to acquaint themselves with the unique delivery method of WBT to increase computer familiarity as well as decrease any anxiety associated with using computers and the Internet.

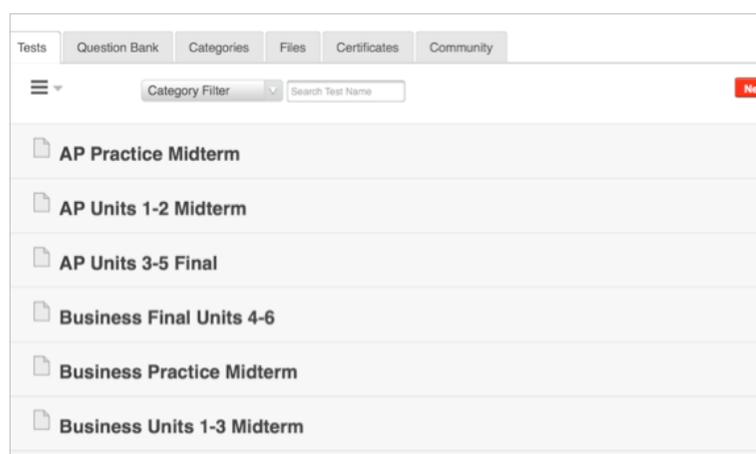
How?

It is not necessary to have a vast amount of computer-programming expertise to create and administer an online test. In fact, it is fairly easy, only requiring basic computer and Internet skills. In other words, if you are able to navigate the Internet without difficulty, then creating tests and administering them should be simple. The following explanation will detail how to create and administer tests via classmarker.com.

Creating an Exam

1. After creating an account, click on the orange icon entitled “New Test +” under “My Account” (Figure 2).
2. Next, create a name for the test. You may also make or select a specific category you would like the exam questions to be under. By doing this, all of the items you create for the test will be saved under the category for easy access and use in other exams. If no category is chosen, the questions will be classified under the “Generic” category.

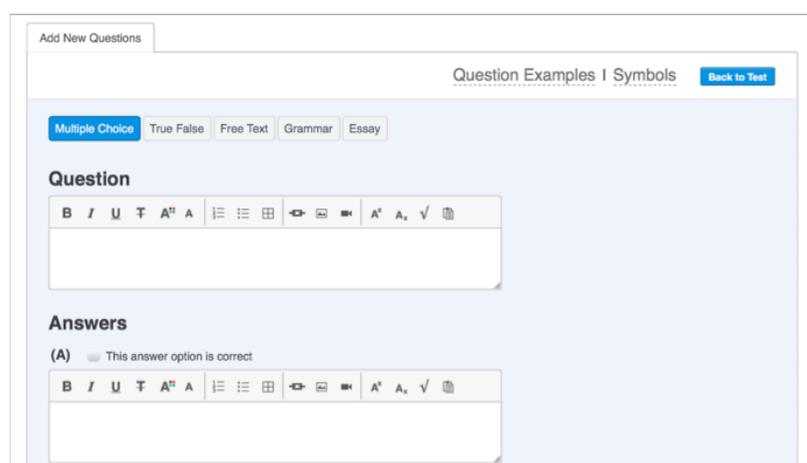
Figure 2 Creating a New Exam



1. From here, you can add pre-made questions from a category or create new ones. Five types of questions can be made: multiple choice, true/false, free text (cloze), grammar, and essay (Figure 3). To create a question, simply type the appropriate information, i.e., the question or prompt, potential answers, and the correct response or responses in the respective boxes. When creating a test item, pictures and videos may also be included by either embedding the link from the website or uploading the picture or video directly onto the website.

2. Lastly, choose the weight or the number of points available for the test item and save the question. If it is a multiple-choice item, you may also randomize the order of the potential answers.

Figure 3 Making Questions



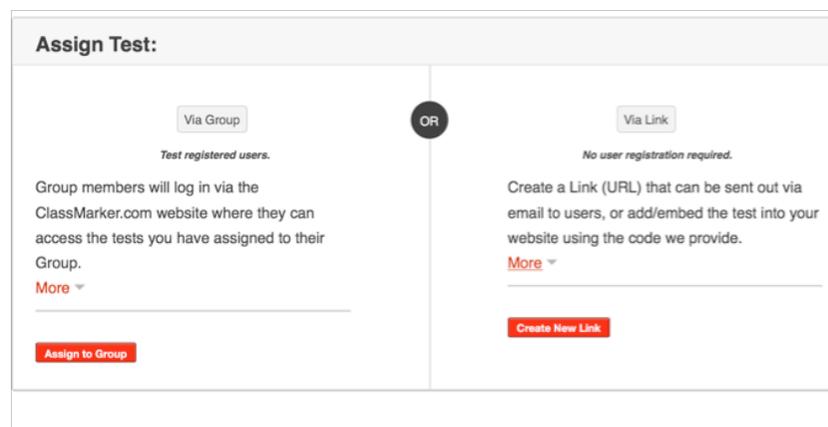
Administering an Exam

1. Once you have completed making an exam, there are two ways to administer or assign it: via group or via link (Figure 4). The easiest way is to create a link for the test. That way, students only have to click on the provided link

or copy and paste it into the web address bar. For increased security, you may also password protect the exam. The only caveat with assigning an exam via link is that it is only available to paid accounts.

2. The other option, which is available to free accounts, is to create usernames for the students, designate them to a specific class or group, and then assign the test to a group. Fortunately, it is simple to create bulk usernames. All you need to do is create a list of the students’ first and last names. Passwords are automatically generated for them but you can also create customized passwords. If you know your students’ email addresses, usernames and passwords can be emailed in order to expedite the process.

Figure 4 Assigning an Exam



3. A variety of settings can be adjusted when assigning an exam (Figure 5). For example, you can randomize the order of the questions to decrease the likelihood of cheating during group testing, set a pass mark or time limit for the exam, as well as restrict test availability to a fixed day and time. In addition, you also have the option of changing the test interface language from English. Twelve other languages including Japanese are available. Students must feel comfortable with the delivery format of WBT in order for them to be effective. Therefore, selecting the students’ native language for the test interface may be appropriate, especially when administering an exam to students with low L2 proficiency.

Figure 5 Exam Settings



Conclusion

WBT offer teachers a timesaving alternative to traditional PBT. Although time must be spent creating tests from scratch

and familiarizing students with the unique testing format, doing so will save instructors time and energy in the long run because a large portion of the exams are automatically graded. Another benefit is that students can take WBT anywhere and anytime, making them perfect for low-stakes formative assessments. They also may be used for medium- and high-stakes exams; however, students must be supervised and monitored in these types of situations where students have an incentive to cheat (Roever, 2001).

In my experience, students seem to genuinely enjoy taking exams via the Internet. What is most important is that they are provided adequate time for training and experimentation with the testing medium “For students to be effective users of a computer tool or learning application, they must first understand how to operate it and then become comfortable with its operation” (Hubbard & Romeo, 2012, p. 38). After students are given time to familiarize themselves with the delivery format, they seem to adapt fairly and as a result, they are able solely concentrate on their performance on assessments.

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